THE PLAYS FOR MARCH NIGHTS

CORA WITHERSPOON in "THE KING"

RAE HARTLEY, THELMA TURNBULL and FLORENCE ELMORE from "SINBAD"

INA CLAIRE in "POLLY WITH A PAST" Photo by J. de Strelecki

By LAWRENCE REAMER.

THE influence of good acting is still capable of touching the sensibilities of the New York theatregoer, rarely as he may have the opportunity to witness anything more artistic than the smug competency which is just now characteristic of most representations given under the auspices of the so-called leading managers. Much of the slipshod manner of presentation characteristic of the so-called palmy days of the theatre has disappeared. Rarely is there completely incompetence or the altogether unsuitable person found in a contemporaneous cast, but just as rarely is there anything about the representation which is not altogether the work of the author. In other words, half a dozen other players selected at random would probably have been just as capable as the half dozen actually engaged in the representation. It is, of course, indispensable that the actors should look and be what the wise "producer" calls "the type" of the character. New York plays to-day show so thoroughly the selection of actors because they are types that one need only read the list in a contemporaneous production to know just what sort of men and women there are to be in the piece.

Of course Mr. Warfield comes along at times with one of his very short list of characterizations; Mr. Skinner finds a part that suits him in the eyes of New Yorkers as well of his devoted admirers on the road; George Arliss somewhere in a historical dictionary comes across a part he will be able to look more or less like, and Mr. Ditrichstein finds a part for himself in Paris or Budapest. These are important instances in the progress of dramatic art as it is understood in New York. Woe betide this unfortunate actor, however, if he happens to be provided with a play that does not interest the public. Then the actor's art as it is shown by these eminent players may go hang!

So to have the great skill of Lionel Barrymore make the deep impression on theatregoers that is now to be observed in "The Copperhead" every night at the Shubert Theatre is a source of immense gratification to all who love to keep the theatre in their list of the arts. After all, it is not the most that can be done in the theatre to have the men all of sufficient height and of bearing correct to their parts and the women comely and blond, although it is to be feared under existing conditions that the taste of the theatre managers when it alone is consulted will always be for blond beauty. For the occasional flash of stage genius will flame up at intervals to make the theatre something more than the mere abode of adequacy, smooth and agreeable to the eye.

Mr. Barrymore had years ago given indications of unusual talent both in John Henderson's "The Mummy and the Humming Bird" and as the irresponsible young New York tough of "The Other Girl." Then he was lost to the sight of New Yorkers for a long time, acting occasionally in the cinema and at other times devoting himself to the art of painting. His appearance last spring in "Peter Ibbetson" proved that absence from the stage had not diminished his capacity but increased his resources and ripened the powers which he had revealed years before. But there was scarcely promise of the force, sincerity and artistic resource that he now reveals in "The Copperhead."

More than one commentator observed at the first performance that Mr. Barrymore recalled the late Joseph Jefferson, although it was by none of them meant to imply that he was attempting any sort of an imitation of that actor. It was probably in his naturalness that he was most suggestive of him. Mr. Barrymore luckily imitates nobody. He is not attempting to reproduce the vocal peculiarities of this famous person or the gait of that one nor is he trying to copy the mannerism of any noted player. It is his fine naturalness, his freedom from such tendency to copy any actor, his complete absorption in the task of representing the soul of a man in certain conditions as he thinks the man would have felt and acted, that makes the simple greatness of his art so compelling that spectators gather there in large numbers every night merely to feel the spell of his fine acting, acting of the noblest and most genuine type, in the final act of "The Copperhead."

After years of misunderstanding and martyrdom for the sake of his country because he is suspected of pacific leanings or worse, the hero of Mr. Landis's story and Mr. Thomas's play has the chance to vindicate himself. He is not going to be hurried about it. He will, in the presence of his friends and enemies, tell the story that has been burning in his brain for years—nearly half a century. Mr. Barrymore recites it, imparting vitality to every word, illuminating every incident with his facial change and vocal accent, living again, although in the sight of others, the scenes which have been so persistent in his own life. It is a remarkable achievement in histrionism pure and simple, obedient to the finest tandards of the art and most distinguished probably in its deference to nature as its model.

Inevitably the share of the playwright in this triumph of the actor must suggest itself. No player rises superior to the position in which the dramatist has placed him. The actor's opportunity is inevitably the creation of the playwright, and there is much of the same divided responsibility in the triumph of the last act of "The Copperhead." The scene, with its touching references to Lincoln, was of course devised by Mr. Thomas from Mr. Landis's story, although its tender execution is Mr. Barrymore's own achievement.

But the playwright has done one wonderful service to the actor. Every word that is spoken in "The Copperhead" from the first time the curtain rises adds to the interest of the old man's recital. Every act that increases the suspicion of his guilt makes the spectator await the final explanation that will clear the air in one way or another. The spectators for two hours sit in half mystery. A little here of truth and a little there is let out to them. But there is enough to pique the curiosity, not to satisfy it.

So the audience sits in growing curiosity to hear how and under what circumstances the old man did or did not betray his country. When Lionel Barrymore in the last act steps out to tell them, therefore, what has happened there is the keenest attention to this long deferred revelation, and the actor's triumph by the way he does what the author has prepared for him, helps mightily to bring New York just now to the Shubert Theatre with so much enthusiasm.

American audiences are keen for "character," as it is called on the stage, although, thanks to the opinion of the managers, they get precious few chances to admire this kind of acting. Laurette Taylor, who seems just now to be the most popular of the players that cling to New York, is a character actress if ever there was one. It is perfectly true that she usually plays herself, but it is her irresistible self in some new manifestation that is just as attractive to the public as its predecessor. It is only impossible for her to play any part which requires the illusion of breeding, since she is rather essentially gamine always. But in "Happiness" she gives the impression of a dressmaker, just as in "Out There" she was the transplanted London slavey. There is always the strong suggestion of the sort of a person Miss Taylor is supposed to be playing.

American audiences used to be able to see actors representing characters until the wisdom of the magnates a few years ago powerfully announced that the public came to the theatre to see Miss Adams or Miss Barrymore or Miss Anglin and not the character they were supposed to represent. Then they promptly proceeded to put this intellectual dictum into effect by compelling the actress to be herself first, whatever she might be afterward. The same course was followed in the case of popular actors, and "character" all but ceased to exist on the stage.

Just how necessary "character" may be to a play is shown in "The Off Chance" at the Empire Theatre. The hero of Mr. Carton's work is a young duke, evidently some such personage as the youthful lord in "Miscarriage" and so incarnated would increase greatly the London humor of Mr. Carton's indestructible formula. But the managerial disapproval of "character" under such conditions made itself potently felt at this point. So the duke supposed to be a youth is acted by a popular leading man now rapidly approaching the usual age which we know to be middle age. Of course the comedy suffers. But managerial wisdom is asserted.

NEW PLAYS IN THE THEATRES.

TWO new plays will be added to the repertoire of the Theatre du Vieux Colombier on Tuesday evening, March 5. On that date "L'Amour Medicin" (The Love Doctor), by Moliere, and "La Petite Marquise" (The Little Marquise) will have their first presentation here.

"L'Amour Medecin" is one of the best known of Moliere's comedies. In this play the great French playwright for the second time in his dramas attacks and ridicules the medical profession. "L'Amour Medecin" was on the first programme of the Theatre du Vieux Colombier in Paris in 1913, and was given over seventy-five times during its first season.

"La Petite Marquise," by Meilhac and Halevy, is a three act light modern comedy which, originally produced in Paris in 1874, has since remained one of the most popular of French plays. The play touches on the subject of marriage in a light and graceful manner. Paulette Noiseaux and M. Cassa take the leading roles.

On Thursday afternoon at the Booth Theatre Stuart Walker will present the first special matinee of "The Book of Job." This is not an adaptation or dramatization of the Bible story, but a presentation of the actual Old Testament dialogue. It is thought to be the first time that the text of the Old Testament story has been presented in literal form in the theatre. Two Narrators, played by Margaret Mower and Judith Lowry, will tell such parts of the drama as are not in dialogue form, namely the prologue and epilogue. *Job* will be played by George Gaul, and his three friends by Edgar Stehli, Harry Buckler and Eugene Stockdale. Walter Hampden will play the young man, *Elihu*, and the Voice Out of the Whirlwind will be spoken by David Bispham.

The opening of the New Vanderbilt Theatre has been postponed until Thursday, when Harry Carroll and William Sheer's musical comedy "Oh Look!" with Harry Fox as the star will be the attraction. This new comedy was written by James Montgomery. The music was composed by Mr. Carroll the well known composer, and Joseph McCarthy wrote the lyrics.

The cast that supports Mr. Fox consists of Louise Cox, Harry Kelly, George Sidney, Alexander F. Frank, Ted Wing, Frederick Burton, Alfred Kappeler, Clarence Nordstrom, Charles Mussett, Genevieve Tobin, Amelia Gardner, Florence Bruce, Betty Hope Hale, Mildred Sinclair, Betty Hamilton, Emily Morrison, Francis Grant, Elsie Gordon and Elsa Thomas.

Frances White and William Rock are to provide most of the entertainment in a new "intimate revue" which Raymond Hitchcock will present at the Fulton Theatre on Thursday. It will be called "Let's Go."

A SPEECH THAT IS NEVER HEARD.

One of the laughable bits of "The Gipsy Trail" is a speech that is always inaudible. It is the fish story with which Roland Young as the matter of fact *Ned Andrews* brings down the curtain of the second act.

As originally planned by Robert Housum the second act curtain dissatisfied both the author and Arthur Hopkins. It will be remembered that at the end of the act the romantic *Michael*, panic stricken by the thought that his love affair threatens all the vagabond joy that his life has held hitherto, bolts from the girl to whom he has just confessed his love. *Ned* and his grandmother, *Mrs. Widdimore*, endeavor to comfort the puzzled and suffering *Frances*.

After several conferences during the rehearsals of the comedy Mr. Hopkins and Mr. Housum both began to despair of the suggested endings. Either *Ned* and *Mrs. Widdimore* must seem callous to the very real disappointment of *Frances* in the man with whom she had fallen in love, or else the pathetic sight of *Frances* gazing yearningly out into the night after her vanished lover would strike a false note.

At last the present solution occurred Mr. Housum, happily ending the act upon a bit of delicious caricature. The proposed speech saved the situation and rang down the curtain upon a frantic effort by *Ned* to live up to the romanticism of his recreant rival. Unfortunately the effect of the ending, however, causes the curtain to cut short the speech of which but the first two words ever reach the audience. Hence the opportunity is hereby presented for audiences of "The Gipsy Trail" past, present and future, to learn what *Ned* actually does say.

Frances, almost sobbing, confesses: "He never could have cared for me and I—I didn't *really* care for him. I was just swept off my feet."

Ned, with a trace of wounded pride, wonders, "You wouldn't think that just a few stories of adventure would make such a difference to a girl."

Then there is a pause—one of those inimitable pauses during which Roland Young as *Ned* gets an idea. He looks at *Frances*, ponders, shifts his feet, clears his throat and begins in a most didactic and dutiful tone: "It was in the August of nineteen-twelve that I was fishing in Canada on Spider Lake, up near Muskoka—no, it wasn't Muskoka either; it was Georgian Bay. I had forgotten to provide myself with one of those fishing licenses—you know? Pure carelessness. Of course I wasn't trying to cheat the Government—and they're only $2 anyhow. And just as I hooked a fish I looked up, and there was the Government inspector watching me. Well of course I lost the fish. It was very awkward for me, not having a license. And there was the inspector looking at me very fiercely; and I suppose he had a gun about him somewhere. So he said to me, 'Have you a license?' And of course I had to confess I didn't. It was the only thing to do, and he said I'd better buy one of him. And so I did—and then I'd really intended to get one all the time. But he overcharged me, having me, so to speak, in a hole ——"

And right there on the manuscript Robert Housum's stage directions read "Curtain," but all the past, present and future readers before mentioned know better; for the curtain really falls on "Georgian Bay!"

HOW THEY GET THEM.

The Manners Family Is Ever Vigilant.

Laurette Taylor once likened [illegible] and her playwright husband, J. Hartley Manners, to the men who are employed to pick up waste paper in the public parks with the aid of pointed sticks.

"We're always on the lookout for little incidents or sidelights on character which we can gather up and store away in our memories," she said, and discuss afterward with the view of utilizing them in one of Mr. Manners's plays. You'd be surprised to know how many little incidents in some of the plays are actual extracts from life and how many of the characters in them have been suggested by actual persons whom we have met."

It is generally known that many of the incident in the widely discussed second act of "Out There" were absolutely veracious, and now comes Miss Taylor with the announcement that at least one of the characters in "Happiness," the play in which she is now appearing at the Criterion, is a faithful and unexaggerated portrait of an actual person. This is the character of *Miss Perkins*, the extremely attractive and empty headed society girl played by the versatile Lynn Fontanne.

"Hartley has succeeded in drawing an accurate sketch of this woman," said Miss Taylor the other night. "The only difference between the fictional character and the stage counterpart is that the lady herself is a widow and not a young woman. She is a woman of quite some distinction in London society whom we both know socially. Her husband is really quite an important figure and his name well known in this country. Never all my life have I heard any one talked so incessantly as she does. It seems to never stop. It's just a gabble, gabble from the moment you meet her until you manage to tear yourself away. She has the most remarkable habit of carrying on a conversation by asking questions which she never means to have answered and which she answers herself before you have time to do so."

A PLAY A WEEK.

Guy Bates Post in "The Masquerader" will begin the week to-morrow night at the Standard Theatre. He will be surrounded by the original cast, which made the play a long run at the Lyceum and Booth theatres. An extra matinee will be given Friday.

Hale Hamilton heads the company, which goes to the Broad Opera House to-morrow night direct from the Thirty-ninth Street Theatre, to present "What's Your Husband Doing?" Associated with Mr. Hamilton will be Robert Ober, Grace Hayles, Jane Cooper, Gretchen Yates, Carol Lloyd, Walter Lewis and George Vivian.

"The Country Cousin," by Booth Tarkington and Julian Street, will be the week's play at Loew's Seventh Avenue Theatre. Alexandria Carlisle, who carried the principal role for the four months it had at the Gaiety Theatre, remains with the play.

THE THEATRES THIS WEEK.

MONDAY——Palace Theatre: First performance in vaudeville of "The Weaker One," war play in one act, by Ethelyn Brewer de Foe.

TUESDAY—Theatre du Vieux Colombier: Jacques Copeau will present two comedies, "L'Amour Medicin," by Moliere, and "La Petite Marquise," by Meilhac and Halevy.

THURSDAY—Booth Theatre: Stuart Walker will present "The Book of Job" at a matinee.

Vanderbilt Theatre: This new playhouse will be opened with "Oh, Look," by James Montague and Harry Carroll.

Fulton Theatre: Frances White and William Rock will appear in a war review called "Let's Go."

PLAYS THAT LAST.

Astor, "Why Marry?"; Belasco, "Polly With a Past"; Bijou, "Girl o' Mine"; Booth, "Seventeen"; Broadhurst, "The Madonna of the Future"; Casino, "Oh, Boy"; Century, "Chu Chin Chow"; Cohan, "The King"; Cort, "Flo-Flo"; Cohan & Harris, "A Tailor Made Man"; Comedy, "Youth"; Criterion, "Happiness"; Eltinge, "Business Before Pleasure"; Empire, "The Off Chance"; Forty-eighth, "The Love Mill"; Forty-fourth, "Maytime"; Fulton, "Let's Go"; Harris, "Success"; Hippodrome, "Cheer Up!"; Hudson, "The Master"; Gaiety, "Sick-a-Bed"; Globe, "Jack o' Lantern"; Greenwich Village Theatre, "Karen"; Liberty, "Going Up"; Longacre, "Yes or No?"; Lyceum, "Tiger Rose"; Maxine Elliott, "Eyes of Youth"; Morosco, "Lombardi, Ltd."; New Amsterdam, "The Cohan Revue, 1918"; Norworth, "Under Pressure"; Park, "Seven Days Leave"; Playhouse, "The Little Teacher"; Plymouth, "The Gipsy Trail"; Princess, "Oh, Lady! Lady!!"; Republic, "Parlor, Bedroom and Bath"; Thirty-ninth, "A Cure for Curables"; Winter Garden, "Sinbad," and Vanderbilt, "Oh, Look."

CURTIS COAKSEY and MARY RYAN in "THE LITTLE TEACHER"

WILLIAM WILLIAMS and ALEXANDER ONSLOW in "HER COUNTRY"

LENORE ULRICH in "TIGER ROSE"

MARGARET MOWER IN "THE BOOK OF JOB"

ESTELLE WINWOOD and SHELLEY HULL in "WHY MARRY"